

YOUR WEEK IN CHINA'S CAPITAL

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BEIJING TODAY

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Wu Mart
Delisted in
Hong Kong

The troubled Beijing grocer is seeking a new way to survive. **Page 4**

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Dumped

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Sinologist
in China

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Single
No More

Since 1980, most Chinese families have been limited to one child. In a surprise move, the government overturned its 30-year policy last week.

As many as 90 million families may qualify for a second child, which would raise the nation's population to an estimated 1.45 billion by 2030. **Page 2**

Pharmacies Pull Cheap Medicine to Boost Profits

BY DIAO DIAO

Dried yeast tablets are a common medicine designed to help with digestion. But the small bags of tablets, which cost less than 1 yuan, have become almost impossible to purchase at Beijing pharmacies.

Reporters at *Beijing Youth Daily* went to six pharmacies in business areas throughout Chaoyang District and found only one store sold dried yeast tablets. Others sold more expensive digestion aids and lactobacillus tablets instead.

The wholesale price of a bag of dried yeast tablets is 0.75 yuan, meaning pharmacies make a 0.15 yuan profit on each sale. Each tablet is 0.2 grams and there are 80 tablets in one bag. The wholesale price of

lactobacillus tablets is 5 yuan and the pharmacy sells them for 28 yuan.

Many of the pharmacies said that they couldn't find a medicine manufacturer that sold dried yeast tablets. Some replied that the dried yeast tablets are no longer available.

In Yongantang pharmacy, when reporters asked if the shop had other brands of dried yeast tablets, the salesperson said they did not stock them due to low profitability. Their cheapest digestion medicine was priced 15 yuan.

Reporters called Shanxi Yuanyuan Pharmaceutical, the manufacturer of the lactobacillus tablets listed on the package. A spokesman for the company surnamed Gong who is in charge of Beijing sales said a box of

lactobacillus tablets contains 300 packages, each priced 5 yuan.

"The suggested price of lactobacillus tablets is 28 yuan. That means a pharmacy earns 23 yuan on each package sold. Pharmacies can adjust the price slightly," Gong said.

Shi Lichen, a pharmacist at Dingchen Pharmaceutical Management Consulting with 10 years of experience, said that although dried yeast tablets and lactobacillus tablets have a similar function, one cannot replace the other.

Shi said that in addition to dried yeast tablets, there are more than 300 basic medicines with little profit value that have become difficult to purchase in Beijing pharmacies. ■

CHINESE STOCK INDEXES

SSE (Shanghai)

Close	Change	YTD
3,522.82	▲ 63.18 (1.83%)	+8.91%

SZSE (Shenzhen)

Close	Change	YTD
11,939.81	▲ 54.91 (0.46%)	+8.40%

HSI (Hong Kong)

Close	Change	YTD
23,051.04	▼ 2.53 (0.01%)	-2.53%

Accurate to market close on November 11, 2015



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China Goes from One Child to Two

BY YANG XIN

The National Family Planning Policy, popularly known as the One-Child Policy, has come to an end.

The policy took effect on September 25, 1980 to balance population development and offset the burden of an aging population by limiting urban couples to one child and rural couples to two, assuming the first child was a girl.

The news came in a statement released by the Communist Party of China at the close of its third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee. The change lifts all prerequisites on couples who wish to have a second child.

As many as 90 million families may qualify for a second child, which would

raise the population to an estimated 1.45 billion by 2030, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission. At the end of 2014, China had an estimated population of 1.37 billion.

However, the policy change will not be valid until the country's top legislature body ratifies it next March. "We expect the policy to be carried forward nationwide by the first quarter of 2016 with the amendment of current Population and Family Planning Law," said Wang Pei'an, deputy head of the Family Planning Commission.

Yet for families willing to have a second child, the statement is a positive signal from the nation. "Any child, as long as he or she is born after the amendment

of the law, shall be protected by the law. Frankly speaking, if you get pregnant now, you child will be a 'legal' baby," said Yang Wenzhuang of NHFPC in an interview with CCTV.

"We expect China's laboring population to be expanded to 30 million by the year 2050," Wang Pei'an said.

Even before the release of the statement, the policy has been relaxed in several provinces since 2013, allowing couples where either the husband or wife was a single child to have a second.

As of September, approximately 1.76 million of the 11 million eligible couples had applied to expand their families, the Family Planning Commission said. ■

Chinese Students' SSAT Scores Canceled

BY DIAO DIAO

More than 350 Chinese candidates' IELTS test results were canceled by the organizer in July. Two months later, organizers of the Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT) were forced to do the same.

On October 20, SSAT officials sent emails to 357 candidates in Beijing and Shanghai saying that the results of Upper Level SSAT results on September 19 were canceled because the committee severely doubted their validity.

Although officials gave no details, Chinese media speculated that it was because a training agency succeeded in predicting the questions and helped too many students to get high or full scores during the September 19 test session.

Reporters at Chinanews.com visited training agencies near the Zhongguancun area in Haidian District and found that pre-

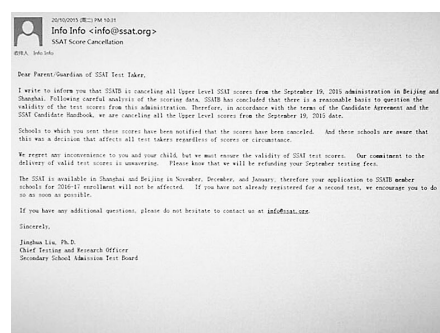


Photo by jlonline.com

dicting questions is a very common method of training.

A teacher surnamed Huang at a school offering SSAT prep courses said the tests often repeat the same questions from year to year. To improve students' scores as quickly as possible, training agencies tell them to simply memorize all the answers.

Typically, the SSAT requires a 10,000-word vocabulary; Chinese middle school students usually only know about 1,000 English words.

A full score on the SSAT is 2,400, but even Chinese students with limited English proficiency can score 1,600. After attending a training class, most can score 2,000 or more.

Agencies typically do not employ foreigners for TOFEL or SSAT prep courses since the goal is to memorize the answers rather than

master the language skills.

Huang said that many students cheat on the test to secure admission to a Top 50 US school. For between 20,000 to 200,000 yuan, depending on the school, a student may be able to hire someone else to take the test in their place.

"I don't think guessing the questions and memorizing the answers is cheating, but asking someone else to take the test for you definitely is," Huang said.

It wasn't just the scores but the increase in scores that caught the attention of SSAT organizers. Many students who previously took the test scored 600 points higher.

The SSAT in January will be the last test before a complete revision of the SSAT designed to thwart current training school practices.

Shi Xin, an education consultant in New York, said that the cancelation of the results is partly because of the performance of Chinese students in American secondary schools. Shi said that the students' overall ability and reading skills are far below the average, which often affects the reputation and average results of schools that trust SSAT scores.

Shi Xin said to Chinanews.com that predicting and memorizing questions is not common in the US. To have students with scores so out of touch with their actual ability may just be a consequence of Chinese education styles, he said. ■

Blood Shortage Breeds Black Market

BY WANG YAN

A 28-year-old man surnamed Yang was charged with illegally selling blood by the Haidian Procuratorate on Tuesday in Beijing.

According to the court, Yang organized five people to sell blood near the Beijing Redcross Blood Center in June. Yang contacted the five via QQ and promised to give them 500 yuan for 400cc blood, *Beijing News* reported.

The five behaved weirdly at the blood center and attracted suspicion from local police. Yang was arrested on the spot.

Although Yang was arrested, the fact that the capital is short on blood has become a serious problem from hospitals and patients.

Beijing News reported that Beijing's hospitals are short on blood for three to four months every year.

When there is not enough blood, hospitals can only make sure patients most in need get access to blood first. But other patients have to rely on a system called "mutual assistance blood donating" which allows patients' family and friends to donate blood.

Blood sellers make money based on the system. They recruit people online to pretend to be patients' family and friends to donate blood; then in turn, blood sellers ask patients' family to pay. The money the family pays is two to three times higher than the sellers pay the donors.

"My father has liver cancer, and he is in need of blood. I have no choice other than to turn to these people," Wu Yue, a patient's daughter, told *Beijing News*.

Wu Yue's father needs 800cc blood. Wu Yue already donated 400cc blood, and she had to buy the rest from the seller. For the other 400cc she had to pay 1,800 yuan.

Wu said she doesn't like these people, but without them she can't get access to blood.

Faced with a serious blood shortage, hospitals and doctors feel powerless and don't know what to do. "It's not just in Beijing, the whole country is in need of blood," Ton Chongrong, deputy director of a blood center in suburb Beijing, told *Beijing News*.

China's unpaid blood donation rate is extremely low. According to the latest data published by China's National Health and Family Planning Commission, the unpaid blood donation rate is only 0.95 percent.

The World Health Organization recommends that countries have an unpaid blood donation rate of 1 to 3 percent. ■



CFP Photos



Photo by Beijing News



Photo by CFP

Underground Gamblers Sour the Spirit of Cricket Fights

BY YANG XIN

While most countries treat crickets as pests or foodstuffs, in China a 1,000-year tradition makes the noble bug a singing pet or gladiator. Most cricket fights take place between August and October.

Ordinarily, the survival of a cultural tradition into the 21st century would be a cause for celebration. But the traditional pastime has been soured with an underground, illegal cricket-fighting arena where enthusiasts waged up to 1 million yuan on the prowess of prized bugs.

Police began investigating the gambling ring when a man surnamed Wang reported the chirping of crickets as being audible outside a chess room in Fengtai District. After half a month's of undercover investigation, police announced that the chess room was actually a front for a gambling den.

An unusual amount of people were

spotted going in and out every night at 8 pm. Many were carrying black, cloth boxes that covered two to three jars of crickets, investigators said. As many as 60 gamblers crammed into the small room every night.

Local police said most of the gamblers were jobless, middle-aged men. Two are currently being held on criminal charges and another 10 are in police custody.

A 45-year-old gambler surnamed Liu said he is a Beijing native who has enjoyed the sport for 20 years. Liu told police he visits fish markets in Beijing and Shandong every fall to find new fighting crickets for the underground arena.

"The cost of a cricket could vary from hundreds to tens of thousands of yuan. One of my friends actually spent 20,000 yuan," he said.

Liu said the bugs are given showers and rigorous combat training. They

are also provided with female crickets for mating to calm the bugs down between matches.

Keeping a cricket can cost 30,000 to 40,000 yuan, even though most bugs have a lifespan of only 100 days. In order to recoup the cost, some cricket enthusiasts opt to take their bugs to a gambling den.

The chess room owner surnamed Bai acted as the referee in matches and took a 5 percent commission on all bets. "With really back luck, you could lose tens of thousands of yuan overnight," gamblers said.

China's Criminal Law stipulates that people involved in organized gambling may face up to three years in prison. Organizers of more than three gamblers who have taken up to 5,000 yuan may be convicted of the crime of organizing gambling, said Han Xiao, lawyer of Beijing Jingrun Law Firm. ■



Woman Applies for Time Off to See Husband

"It's been so long, I've almost forgotten what my husband looks like. I want to see him," read a formal request for leave that appeared on Weibo last week.

The woman, who remains unknown, asked for 10 days leave to travel from Jinan, Shandong province to Lhasa via Xi'an.

A complete rail path between the two cities was only recently completed, a spokesperson for #20 China Railway Bureau Group said. It's unknown how long the couple has been separated without any connection.

(Tencent News)

Women Strip Down to Thongs, Heels to Promote App

A group of women were seen walking in black thongs and heels near Jianwai SOHO this week. Each had a QR code painted on her posterior.

Within a few minutes of appearing on the street, security guards detained the women. Police are now involved in the investigation.

The stunt appears to have been an ill-planned marketing campaign for a new mobile application since no one who saw the nearly nude women can remember what they were advertising.

(Tencent News)

Guangzhou Prostitution Ring Taking Credit Cards

Guangzhou police were a bit surprised by what they took in during a recent prostitution bust. Aside from the usual, cars, phones and cash, they also found a POS machine in the hands of the 28-person prostitution ring.

The group, focused on online-organized prostitution, worked out of a hotel that they managed day to day. The primary business was attracting clients to the hotel using the Internet.

Police said most of the clients were executives from Hangzhou-based enterprises.

Thirteen women prostitutes, 15 gang members and nine male clients were arrested during the bust.

(Tencent News)

Dropped Bride Spends Wedding Day in Coma

There won't be many happy wedding day memories for one bride in Tengzhou, Shandong province: she spent much of it in a coma after three groomsmen threw her up in the air and forgot to catch her.

The bride struck the ground with the back of her head and was unable to regain consciousness.

After being taken to the hospital in an ambulance, the bride awoke, but spent two more days in the hospital before being discharged.

(Tencent News)

Beijing Leads National Average in Reading

BY WANG YAN

Beijing Reading Season, a three-day festival to promote reading, healthy lifestyles and children's literature, was held from October 27 to 29.

The festival invited representatives from various industries including science, charity, technology, culture, education, tourism and real estate to participate. A report on Beijingers' reading habits was published after the three-day event.

According to the report, the average reading rate among Beijingers is 91.16 percent, higher than other Chinese cities. In 2015, the average Beijing resident read 9.49 books. The report indicated most people spend 318.17 yuan on paper books and 52.7 percent of residents regularly read a newspaper.

Although e-books are becoming more popular around the world, the Beijing market still prefers paper books and brick-and-mortar bookstores as their primary sales channel.

In a poll, 62.4 percent of Beijingers said they buy their books at a real bookstore and 44.1 percent buy theirs online.

Portable reading has seen a drastic increase, the report said. In 2014, 78.2 percent of readers read on cellphone, a 31 percent year-on-year increase.

The report also said that political news and subjects such as health and lifestyles are the most popular among Beijing's readers. ■

Passengers to Pay for Choice in Domestic Flights

BY DIAO DIAO

Since 2014, China's airline companies have been rolling out a new service for passengers: paying for comfort.

In the last few months, China Airline, China Southern Airline, Hainan Airlines and other Chinese carriers have started to charge extra money for passengers who want to choose their own seats – even in economy class.

While seats used to be randomly arranged after payment, now seats near emergency exits or in the first row are being blocked from random assignment.

The website of China Southern Airlines has paid seat selection service on 12 international lines to Europe, Australia and the Americas. China Southern Airline says that only some seats are open for paid selection, and that the price is between 300 to 600 yuan.

China Eastern started a similar service this year. The number of paid seats varies from six to eight according to the type of plane. China Eastern said sales of paid seats have been increasing since May.

Many domestic airlines also started to open paid seats. From October 15, Hainan Airline began offering paid seats on most domestic lines. The first three rows in Economy Class cost 100 yuan, 80 yuan and 50 yuan. Passengers must book the seat two days before departure.

Many passengers have complained that the service is absurd. If the price of a ticket is 1,000 yuan and seat assignment costs 100 yuan, that means passengers pay 10 percent of their ticket fee to pick a seat.

China Airline says that international airlines began providing paid seats long ago, and it's a trend because passengers have demands.

Zhang Qihuai, a spokesperson for the Chinese Airline Law Service Center, told Beijing Youth Daily that there is a big difference between foreign airlines and Chinese airlines.

"Foreign airlines have their own pricing system. But in China, First Class and Business Class are decided by the market while the price of economy seating is set by the government. The airlines cannot change it," Zhang said. ■

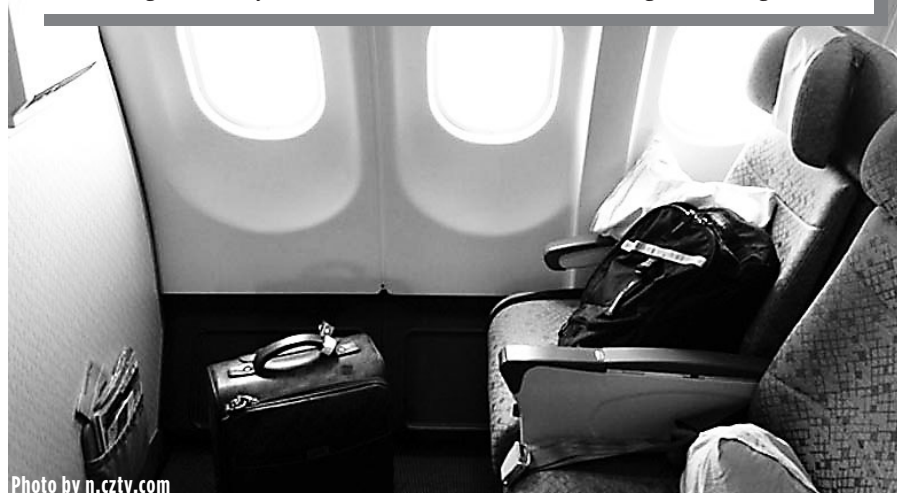


Photo by n.cztv.com

Ailing Supermarket Chain Wu Mart Delists to Reform

BY SHU PENGQIAN

Wu Mart, the biggest supermarket chain in Beijing and in northern China, announced it planned to delist from Hong Kong on October 20. The announcement came after the troubled grocer's decision to suspend trading on October 5, when Wu Mart's stock closed at HK \$3.27.

Asked about its delisting, Wu Mart said its main business is focused on operating supermarkets and convenience stores in China. But its performance has slumped in recent years, hampered by rising real estate and labor costs and competition from Internet sellers.

It said the whole retail industry was facing a time of integration, and that Wu Mart would take decisive measures to consolidate its status in the market.

Simple Beginnings

Wu Mart was founded in December 1994 by several people who had spent time abroad. It was the capital's first standardized supermarket chain, and Beijingers were naturally curious about the store.

With few competitors, Wu Mart developed quickly and reached 100 million yuan in sales in 1995. Two years later, it began expanding its business

through cooperation with the state-owned Beijing Shijingshan Gucheng Food Market, and then through mergers and acquisitions. Statistics from Iyio.com show the chain opened 50 branches in Beijing in 2000, and by 2002 it had operated three hypermarkets, 30 supermarkets and 200 convenience stores.

In April 2004, Wu Mart purchased a 25 percent stake in Beijing Chaoshifa Chain Store. The move ensured its leading position as controlling 35 percent of the Beijing market.

Wu Mart continued its march by targeting Tianjin. In December 2004, it purchased 12 stores in the city of Tianjin from Daiei, a Japanese supermarket chain. Following development in Beijing market, Wu Mart grabbed the Tianjin market, as well.

While the strategy appeared effective early on, in recent years Wu Mart has come to reconsider its achievements.

The company's growth rate in earnings always remained at around 50 percent, but since 2006, its net profit declined from 41.3 percent in 2007 to 2.6 percent in 2012.

Internal Problems

2006 was the year Wu Mart met its

greatest challenge: the slow fall of founder and CEO Zhang Wenzhong.

The Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Central Committee of the CPC began investigating Zhang in 2006, and by October 2008 Zhang had been sentenced to 18 years for embezzlement, bribery and swindling.

Before Zhang's fall, Wu Mart was expanding quickly – at one time, it controlled a third of Beijing's retail market. "This case hit Wu Mart so hard. No one was ready for it, and many plans had to be stranded," Wu Jianzhong, the second CEO of Wu Mart, told *Beijing Times* in 2008.

Affected by this case, Wu Mart applied for a suspension at Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing in November 2006. It resumed trading in September 2007.

On the surface, Wu Mart weathered the crisis: internally, it was broken. And its competition knew it.

In 2006, Wu Mart failed to acquire Family Market – a chain snapped up by China Resources (Holdings) in 2007. The missed opportunity cost it the Tianjin market. In 2013, Wu Mart missed in its attempt to acquire 36 stores from Lotus Market.

Even its successful acquisitions failed to benefit the company.

External Trouble

Faced with its internal problems, Wu Mart could hardly survive the loss of its shoppers to the Internet – a trend that has exerted a crushing effect on all Chinese supermarkets.

"I seldom go shopping on the supermarket. It is troublesome to park on the market," Zhang Jing, an office worker in Beijing, told sh.winshang.com. "I can buy inexpensive and good-quality articles on the Internet, and the online shops provide home delivery service."

Linkshop.com.cn released a report on April 30 that found as many as 120 large and mid-sized retail stores had perished in China.

The China National Commercial Information Center said that from January to February 2015, the gross sales of 100 large Chinese retail corporations dropped 1 percent: their growth rate fell 2.5 percent.

Today, Wu Mart is seeking room to reform.

"In the future, hypermarkets and supermarkets will probably be scattered into small convenience stores or community markets. Wu Mart might be preparing for that new business, so it delisted," Sh.winshang.com wrote in an analysis. ■

Photo by map.baidu.com





Photo by Hexun.com

Civil Service Exams the Path of Least Conflict for China's Youth

BY WANG YAN

On a sunny day in April, An Changhui, a 22-year-old girl, was sitting in a classroom in the No. 18 Middle School of Yinchuan in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. An picked the second last desk near the window thinking her answer sheet won't be taken right away when the exam finished.

She was taking the provincial level National Civil Service Exam to secure a position in a bureau under the Guyuan government: her first test was on politics. An was stunned to see there were 10 more questions than usual and worried she couldn't finish.

An's choice to pursue a career in government is one shared by many of her peers.

Highly Competitive

The enrollment process for the national level civil service exam ended on October 24. According to public records, the 10-day enrollment drew 1.99 million test takers. About 1.39 million passed the qualification examination.

According to the country's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, as many as 50 applicants were vying for each position – lower than last year's 63. The average competition rate is 1:46.

The exam has long been known as the most competitive exam in the country. In 1994, only 44,000 people applied for the exam. That number has increased 300 times in 20 years – in 2014, the application rate reached 1.41 million. 2013 saw the peak when 1.52 million people applied for the exam.

Why Civil Servants?

A popular explanation to the phenomena is a surge in university graduation rates.



Photo by Eduhebei.com

"In 1999, China decided to enlarge the scale of its higher education. The number of new students admitted to college increased by more than 40 percent," according to a report by IZA, a private independent economic research institute.

With such a drastic increase in the number of graduates, the private sector failed to provide sufficient jobs and graduates were forced to turn to the government. Benefits that come with the job – such as steep housing discounts and a higher pension – are appealing to job seekers.

The country's official cadre culture also plays a role. Although a civil servant will not necessarily enjoy a luxurious lifestyle, there is ample chance to be promoted within the system rise to power.

Since imperial times, Chinese society has respected authority and hierarchical organizations. After the beginning of the country's market reforms, materialism became perva-

sive even among officials. Reoccurring stories about corrupt officials have helped to reinforce the idea that a civil servant, though earning a low salary on paper, gains the opportunity to make big money by abusing the power that comes with the job.

One of this reporter's coworkers is also thinking about taking the exam. But for her, the exam is not a voluntary choice.

"My family has been asking me to become a civil servant since my first year in college. I didn't apply for the provincial level exam like my friend, but now I am considering quitting and I cannot stand let them down again, so I will apply for it this time," she said.

Traditional families emphasize stability – especially stable employment for women. Furthermore, social custom makes it difficult to challenge one's parents in China.

"A part of me wanted to take the exam because the job will be stable and more relaxing. But another part of me doesn't want to

compromise because if I do this time, I might have to compromise more in the future. The world is so big, and I still want to go outside to have a look," she said.

For the majority of young Chinese who were born in the 1980s and 1990s, the clash with their 1950-1960s parents is a lifelong event: from work to love and marriage and to families and babies, every step can be a battle.

The older generation endured the infamous Great Famine, Three-Year Natural Disaster and Cultural Revolution. Those years of turmoil made their yearning for stability especially strong. Most fear change and believe that employment outside a state-owned company or the government is equal to instability.

It can be tough for parents who spent their own 20s laboring on remote farms to understand children who live on the Internet and go on casual dates, British writer James Palmer wrote in his article "Balinghou" published on Aeon in 2013.

In Palmer's article, Zhang Jun, a 26-year-old Ph.D student, described his clash with his parents as such: "It's not just a generation gap. It's a values gap, a wealth gap, an education gap, a relationships gap, an information gap."

Yi Yanshu, who works for a public-sector organization in Beijing, said although she is not quite happy with her job, her parents are very proud of her and are proud to tell their friends and family about her job.

Power = Money?

An passed her examination and now works in the bureau she applied for. She said the work is not as boring as imagined and her mentality has changed. "I now look at it as an ordinary job. But no matter what your job is you need to try your best," she said.

An said if given another choice she would still consider applying for the exam.

"My boss said if you want to be an official, then don't think about making money; and if you want to make money, then give up the idea of being an official," she said.

Of course, just how many of China's millions of officials share this noble view will remain a mystery. ■

BY SIMINA MISTREANU

After she graduated from high school in Sicily, Maria A. Ruggieri was researching universities of Oriental Studies. She opened a Chinese dictionary. She thought the characters were beautiful: artistic but at the same time well-structured. She enrolled at Cà Foscari University in Venice's Oriental Languages and Literature department.

In the summer after her sophomore year, she spent more than three months in China taking language classes and traveling.

It was enough to make her fall in love with the country.

She returned for her senior year to research her thesis, a study of Chinese cinema in the 1930s. Cinema had always been her passion and maintained an effortless presence in her life. As soon as she graduated from college in 1998, she returned to China: this time to stay.

She studied contemporary cinema and directing at the Beijing Film Academy. At the end of her two-year program, she began renewing her visa a year at a time.

"China was, in my eyes, so different that I needed to spend more time... I actually lost the perception of time in some ways," she says. "For me it was impossible to say the chapter is going to end, and there's nothing else to learn or nothing else to explore."

China was quite different in 1995. Beijing had living hutongs and fewer expats. People approached Ruggieri with curiosity and caution, but also with warmth.

Expats who came to Beijing led by their passion for cinema were mostly scholars; but business people soon outnumbered them as the film market opened and expanded.

In the early 1980s, Chinese cinema produced its first generation of directors who were successful abroad. The so-called "fifth



Photo Courtesy of Maria A. Ruggieri

Film Brings Awe, Lessons to Italian Sinologist

generation filmmakers" were the first to graduate from Beijing Film Academy after the Cultural Revolution. Their movies, which depicted an exotic China, came with a fresh perspective and were well-received at international film festivals.

In the late 1980s-early 1990s, the "sixth generation" of filmmakers were independent and produced more underground, artistic films that were often socially and politically charged. The alternatives were propaganda films, produced by official studios that were part of the state-controlled system.

In 2001, the government opened the film market to private producers and investors. The number of films soared – from about 90 per year in 2001 to 618 in 2014. Today, China has one of the three largest film industries in the world, along with the US and India. Many of its movies are commercial blockbusters.

Ruggieri works as a consultant for film festivals such as Udine Far East Film Festival and Locarno International Film Festival. She helps them select Chinese movies, of which she watches enormous amounts each year. She also collaborates with the Beijing International Film Festival, helps organize the Italian Film Week and works with Chinese filmmakers. One of her long-term projects involved research for a documentary about people who lived in Tianjin's Italian concession in the 1930s.

One of the most important things she's learned in China is related to people's pragmatism and focus on living in the moment.

"Today you have regulations, yes, rules, yes, but there are also chances. And this is what a lot of Chinese people focus on: the chances (I have) today that I didn't have yesterday," she says. "And I don't know if I'm going to have the same chances tomorrow because things are not necessarily going in the direction you would expect in a country this big." ■

Chinese Films Find Success in China, Failure Abroad

BY SIMINA MISTREANU

The content and storylines of Chinese movies as well as insufficient social and cultural context contribute to their failure to attract viewers abroad, according to expats in the Chinese film industry.

Li Chow, managing director of Sony Pictures Entertainment-China, along with independent producer Isabelle Glachant and sinologist Maria A. Ruggieri, sat on a panel about Chinese movies going global on Monday at The Bookworm in Beijing. The event was hosted by The Royal Asiatic Society China and moderated by long-time China correspondent Laura Daverio.

Last year, China produced 618 movies that had a combined box office take of \$4.7 billion, a 37 percent increase from 2013. Between three and 15 cinema screens are added every day in China. Of the Top 10 grossing movies last year, five were Chinese.

But that domestic success hardly translates abroad. The most successful Chinese movie in the US was *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), which grossed \$127 million. In the last 11 years, only one Chinese movie, *Lost in Hong Kong* (2015), made it into the Top 10 at the US box office. And it ranked 10.

Two decades ago, Chinese movies were

artistic, illustrating daily life. Now, China produces mostly commercial blockbusters.

Promoting any foreign-language movie in the US is difficult and time-consuming, Li said. For *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Sony Pictures Classics had an initial limited release in universities. Only after the movie generated positive reviews by word of mouth did Sony pursue a wide release. Viewers arrived – slowly. Sony pushed for the movie to stay in theaters for 31 weeks, which is considered abnormally long.

"That film also worked because the script was very well written, very straightforward," Li said. "There was nothing you couldn't understand. Sometimes Chinese films, because of the historic background, don't explain too much, and a foreigner who doesn't know Chinese history doesn't understand what's happening."

More so than their American counterparts, European audiences are used to foreign films. In fact, Europe embraced Chinese movies such as *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), which depicted China's exoticism and performed well in festivals, Glachant said. Later on, Europeans were just as welcoming to a generation of underground Chinese



filmmakers who produced realistic, documentary-style films that were socially and politically charged.

"But through the years somehow that wave stopped," Glachant said. Nowadays, because producing a movie in China has become so expensive, good-quality films have to be government-approved. Today's Chinese films, which are commercial and mainstream, don't travel well to Europe.

"The European audience is not that interested in a romantic comedy taking place in Beijing or in science fiction," Glachant said. "The audience is not interested when (the films) all look very similar in the story, the cast and the way they're done."

As for participation in international film festivals, Chinese directors are usually very pragmatic, Ruggieri said. They decide beforehand whether they're going to do a movie for the festivals or for the Chinese

public. They usually go for the public, because that's where the money is.

Cultural differences also reflected in the fabric of storytelling. In Western culture, virtually all stories follow the same formula: a sympathetic character faces a problem, which changes him or her, and which leads to a good or a bad ending. But Chinese script writers don't believe in the concept of a growing character, which is essential for Western viewers, Glachant said.

"In Chinese drama, the characters do not change because when you're born, you're born in a certain year, you have a certain blood type, you have a certain name, and you're born to have that life," she said.

In the end, it's the story that dictates a Chinese movie's success abroad – not its fame or budget, Glachant said. "If it's a good film, it will work. If it's not a good film, it won't work." ■



Photo by MHP Communications

Britain's Best Food Takes Center Stage

BY YANG XIN



Photos by Sina.com

The British Embassy in Beijing is on a mission for Beijing's hearts and bellies with a weeklong, citywide dining event: British Menu Week. The event, which began on Monday, provides an unrivalled platform for China's businesses and consumers to experience quality British food.

To celebrate the festival, some of the Britain's culinary leaders will be whipping up limited edition menus designed around the best ingredients the isles have to offer, such as Scottish salmon, succulent pork and unique cheeses from Stilton to Double Gloucester.

From November 2 to 8, top restaurants and chefs will be assigned to create a range of bespoke menus based around British ingredients and recipes. These specially designed menus will both demonstrate the versatility of British ingredients, as chefs build the finest British meat and produce into creative fusion dishes, and showcase great traditional British recipes.

The culinary week is part of the British Embassy's Food is Great campaign, created to bring a taste of modern British cuisine to China.

"Food is Great marks the most ambitious food and drink campaign run by an embassy in China to date. The UK and China have two of the richest and most diverse culinary traditions in the world, and we feel that with more and more British products finding their way into the Chinese market the time is right to give the Chinese people the opportunity to see what is uniquely great about British cuisine," said Barbara Woodward, British Ambassador to China.

The lineup of participating restaurants includes Bistrot B, Feast, Jing Yaa Tang, Johnnie Walker House, Mosto, Stuff'd, TRB Bites, The Village Cafe and Vineyard Cafe's Wudaoying branch.

This launch is only the beginning. The campaign also runs a range of one-off public events including the evening of November 6, when Olly Smith, one of the UK's most prolific and recognizable drinks columnists, will fly in from London to bring his energy and expertise to prepare a list of British drinks at the Opposite House.

Locations may vary. More information about the menu week is available online at www.gov.uk/world/china. ■



Nights of Ink comes to Beijing

BY SIMINA MISTREANU

The 22nd Nights of Ink literary festival took place between March 12 and April 15 in the Walloon Province of Brabant, central Belgium. Now *Nights of Ink* is headed for Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan.

The festival, which promotes Franco-phone authors, will feature Jean-Claude Kangomba and Genevieve Damas. Kangomba is a Congolese author and doctor of languages and letters at the University of Liege. He has published several novels and was awarded the Williams Sassine literary prize in 2006 for the collective opera *Le Camp des Innocents*.

He has written or supervised numerous scientific papers on African and Belgian literature. He is a scientific attaché of Archives et Musée de la Littérature à Bruxelles and hosts literary events at Maison du livre de Saint-Gilles in Brussels.

Damas is a Belgian comedian, scenographer, author and translator. After obtain-

ing a law degree, she studied comedy at l'Institut des Arts de Diffusion (IAD). In 1998, she founded the theater company Compagnie Albertine in Brussels. She has written and acted in a number of plays, and her awards include le Prix littéraire du Parlement de la Communauté Française de Belgique in 2007.

Her first novel, *Si tu Passes la Rivière*, received the Victor Rossel Award in 2011, le Prix des Cinq Continents de la Francophonie in 2012 and Plume d'Or for debut novels in 2012. *Histoire d'un Bonheur*, published in 2014, is a finalist for Prix des Lycéens de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles in 2015.

Kangomba and Damas will hold lectures on November 13 at Beijing Foreign Studies University. Kangomba will speak on Francophone literature of Sub-Saharan Africa from 8 to 10 am. Damas will hold a writing workshop between 5 and 7 pm at the same school. ■



Photos by the Wallonia-Brussels Delegation in China



Beijing Today Media Center, a Chinese Culture Disseminator and Protector

Beijing Today Media Center (BTMC) is a multimedia center that includes audio and video products, magazines, social media channels, newsletters and a newspaper.

It is the only platform of its parent company, Beijing Youth Daily Group, which facilitates cultural exchange, cooperation on international projects and cross-media services. It aims to help domestic government agencies, enterprises and institutions to develop international cooperation, open markets around the globe and promote their brand image.

BTMC is committed to using its resources to record new developments in the old city and to help foreigners gain a deeper understanding of both Beijing and China.

Culture: Old and New

BTMC records and promotes China's intangible cultural heritage by meeting the city's masters of folk art to produce short video works that capture their personal stories and the spirit of their craft.

Its first video was about bristle dolls, or zongren, a Beijing folk art that is intimately tied to the more popularly known Peking Opera.

Zongren is a unique Beijing folk art with a history stretching back some 100 years and Bai Dacheng is its only living master. BTMC interviewed the old craftsman and his son Bai Lin at their workshop in July to produce a short video that documented his efforts to protect and develop the art through times of turmoil.

Apart from tracing Beijing's past arts, BTMC is also recording new works in art and music.

During the first half of 2015, BTMC shot interviews with the local bands Mr. Odd and Sparrow that record how they discovered their passion for music, its performance and how they survive as indie artists.

BTMC is planning more videos on topics that further explore culture, history and the arts.

Corporate & News Website

BTMC operates two websites: its corporate website (beijingtodaymedia.com) and its news portal (beijingtoday.com.cn).

The corporate site offers foreign entrepreneurs valuable knowledge about Chinese markets, while helping domestic entrepreneurs step into the international market.

The website announces partners' cultural-exchange events along with Beijing Today Media Center's own projects

and promotions, including the 2001 Beijing Summer Universiade and 2011 China International Hair Makeup Fashion Show.

The news website offers original news analysis on social, economic and cultural topics, delivered to readers through Internet and mobile terminals.

The website's content is updated daily, with some of it optimized and distributed on social media and in the *Beijing Today* newspaper.

Social Media BTMC has built a strong presence on foreign and domestic social media including Weibo, WeChat, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Reddit, ISSUU and Tumblr, where the company's products receive wide attention and have numerous fans from home and abroad. Attracting readers with original content is BTMC's goal. Among other things, it has launched a popular column on WeChat, introducing the Chinese society and lifestyle.

BTMC also created a reader club – Best Club – that organizes exclusive activities such as concerts, embassy events and theater shows for members.

E-Digest

Since August 2013, BTMC has delivered its digital newsletter, the Beijing Today e-Digest, globally every Friday.

The content of Beijing Today e-Digest is 50 to 60 percent different from that of the newspaper. It contains various columns such as Laowai Comics, Ask BT, Music Trend, Movie Flash, Theater Pop and Book Review.

Beijing Today e-Digest subscribers are generally NGO employees, foreign businesspeople, embassy officials, government officials, international corporate employees, officials in foreign tourism departments, universities and others.

In December 2014, each e-Digest had an average of 102,000 readers, who came from 127 countries and regions.

Except for the above services, BTMC also helps companies design their company's internal magazine, product image, logos and marketing items. For instance, *Fun English*, a bilingual reading material for Chinese pupils, also belongs to BTMC.

Other services include Beijing Today Training Studio, a program launched by Beijing Youth Daily and aimed at helping students who want to develop future careers in English-language reporting, and the Translation Studio, which provides clients with translations and proof-reading services. ■

(By Shu Pengqian)



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